

Statement of Mr. David Sheridan Harrington
before the
Senate Armed Services Committee, July 20, 1973

The events I am about to describe occurred in early 1969 while I was assigned to CORDS/Vietnam as a Program Officer at the I Corps regional headquarters. At that time, I was a First Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps and on a voluntary extension of an initial thirteen month tour in Vietnam. My selection into CORDS was based on my combat infantry experience, my fluency in Vietnamese and French, and my training in psychological operations. Since then, I completed my three years of active duty in March, 1970, and resigned my commission at the end of my six year service obligation.

The possible confirmation of Ambassador William E. Colby as the Director of Central Intelligence disturbs me because I have believed for a long time that he has never explained fully the Phoenix Program at its' operational level. Furthermore, he has never, to my knowledge, offered anything more than vague statements on his efforts either to cease the widespread killings occurring under the Phoenix Program or to divest the United States of any involvement in the assassination of Vietnamese civilians.

Specifically, in testimony before the Committee on Government Operations in 1971, Ambassador Colby answered questions on the Phoenix Program by resorting to evasive and misleading bureaucratic language to distinguish Phoenix policy from operations, and to claim that only a few abuses occurred at the local level, and those without the approval of Phoenix administrators.

However, I attended a meeting in 1969 at which Mr. Colby was told directly about the operational problems of Phoenix, and the many abuses occurring at the local level. From this briefing, he could only conclude that large gaps existed between Phoenix policy in Saigon and operations in the field. Until Mr. Colby provides a complete of the Phoenix Pro-

gram and his role in it, I believe that Mr. Colby's involvement in Phoen-

It raises a serious question as to his suitability for high government office.

Not long after my assignment to DaNang, either in late February or early March, 1969, I was informed by the Deputy for CORDS in I Corps, Mr. Alexander Firfer, that Mr. Colby was coming up for a high level briefing on the status of pacification. Since I had prime responsibility for all statistics and briefing materials, this important meeting stands out in my mind. I was invited to attend the meeting to provide back-up information as needed and to take notes. This opportunity pleased me because I was very interested in meeting officials from Saigon and hearing a discussion of pacification.

The meeting was held in the second floor conference room of CORDS regional headquarters at 22 Bach Dang, DaNang. Present at the meeting 25X1A
from Saigon were Ambassador Colby, [REDACTED] 25X1A
from DaNang, Mr. Firfer, his deputy Mr. Fritz, myself, and [REDACTED] (1A
[REDACTED], the regional CIA director. Two other senior DaNang staff, Robert K. Olson and Robert Mills, attended portions of the briefing.

The initial phase of the meeting lasted about one hour and a half, and included a briefing by my boss and subsequent questions, answers, and discussion of the presentation. Mr. Colby had prepared thoroughly 25X1A
for the briefing, and asked pointed questions on all phases of the pac- 25X1A
ification program. Mr. [REDACTED] was in turn to make a presentation. I knew very little about [REDACTED] besides his position and the fact that many CORDS people, [REDACTED] boss included, had serious questions about the known CIA agents who carried luger pistols and folding stock automatic rifles. Rumors were fairly widespread that these covert operators were engaged in a very dirty war with the Viet Cong and their sympathizers.

[REDACTED] red quite defensive from the begining of his pre-sentation. After a few moments I learned that it was due to complaints from Saigon about I Corps' poor quality intelligence and low neutralization rate of quality Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI). Mr. Colby nodded in such fashion that he was acknowledging his concern and his desire to bear Mr. Musatatos defense. Mr. [REDACTED] focused on three areas of discussion in responding to Saigon's criticisms: one, the low quality of operational groups such as Provisional Reconnaissance Units (PRU's); two, the high number of VCI killed before possible interogation; and three, a criticism of Saigon pressure for high quality VCI. [REDACTED] was drawing a clear picture of the Phoenix program at the local level in order to ward off beaucratice harrassment.

The logic of [REDACTED] presentation moved very clearly towards a sound defense for his efforts in I Corps. He began with the fact that the ill-disciplined nature of the PRUs resulted in very poor operational control over these PRUs by his agents. As a result of the poor discipline and lack of control, many alleged VCI were killed instead of captured. These killingstook place away from CIA supervision and consequently, Musatakos could not guarantee who was killed and certainly could not collect more information on the VCI from these dead Vietnamese. Mr. [REDACTED] gave the general example of a nervous PRU unit out on assignment in Viet Cong territory killing a struggling Vietnamese suspect with a silencer-equipment pistol for fear of attracting attention..At this point, Colby interjected that killing was not CORDS policy regardless of breakdown at the local level.

Mr. [REDACTED] s found the quota system from Saigon particullarly vexing in that he considered himself an operations type and had little use for

Ambassador's demands. He used the allegory from Mao about the sea and the fishes to present his view on the status of guerilla warfare in II Corps. He stated that the sea had been rolled back (that is, the civilian population had largely been driven to the edge of the sea by the

advent of bombing and free fire zones) and what were left was fish (that is, VCI). Mr. [REDACTED] than asked what difference does it make whether we get big fish or little fish? His aim was to obtain permission to include all Vietnamese suspects nuetralized in his quota. Mr. Colby gave no response at this point.

The clear understanding gained from the [REDACTED] briefing was that many abuses occurred at the operational level of the Phoenix Program, including widespread and uncontrolled assassinations.

My difficulty with Mr. Colby's possible confirmation sharpens in light of his testimony before the House Committee on Government Operations, particularly on pages 206 and 207. There, Ambassador Colby limited his knowledge of abuses to some isolated acts by individuals. Furthermore, he added that it took CORDS nearly three years to refine the intelligence gathering system to the point where they were reasonably sure that a Vietnamese civilian was actually a member of the VCI. Today, I have told you that Ambassador Colby was briefed in 1969 about a poor program involving widespread abuses, including murder. Yet, Mr. Colby allowed this program to continue for another two years, apparently without any better assurance that those killed were anything more than innocent Vietnamese civilians.

Hopefully, my testimony has provided a clear base for understanding the important questions raised by Mr. Colby's role in Vietnam, and a firm direction for further inquiries into his knowledge of and involvement in the Phoenix Program. Mr. Colby was informed of the widespread abuses at the operational level of the Phoenix Program in at least one region. What

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abuses in the program and the lack of hard information on VCI, why did he allow the number of "VCI Killed" to continue to climb in 1968, 1970, and 1971? What specific actions were taken, or specific directives issued to disengage United States support of Phoenix? What specific restraints were placed on Phoenix operators as a result of Mr. Colby's learning of abuses in the Phoenix Program? What requirements for the reporting of war crimes did Mr. Colby initiate to insure feedback on abuse in Phoenix?

I believe a full acquittal on all charges against the Phoenix Program and Mr. Colby's direction of it to be a minimum requirement for his confirmation by the U.S. Senate.

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